

PUBLIC SERVICE BUREAU TREE MAINTENANCE POLICY

Introduction

The purpose of this Tree Maintenance Policy is to provide guidelines to administer Section 14.28 of the Long Beach Municipal Code, to preserve and protect the urban forest, and to promote the health and safety of city trees, from the time they are planted through maturity.

Guidelines are included for planting, maintenance, and removal of street trees located in the public rights-of-way (parkways and median islands).

This policy is intended to be used as a reference by City staff, citizens, and private contractors for tree-related decisions in the public rights-of-way in the City of Long Beach.

Tree Planting

The Public Service Bureau of the Department of Public Works is responsible for all tree plantings in city parkways, medians and rights-of-way.

Trees to be planted should be on the Approved Street Tree List (Attachment A), and must be appropriate for the specific planting site.

If a property owner wishes to plant a tree on an adjacent parkway, he/she shall request and complete a Permit to Plant Street Trees (Attachment B) from the Public Service Bureau. The no-fee permit and the Approved Street Tree List will be sent to the requester. As part of the completion and approval of the permit, the property owner shall agree to bear all costs and liability associated with the planting(s), and ensure that any contractor used is licensed by the City. Property owners shall also be responsible to water and fertilize the tree to ensure its healthy growth.

Trees planted without a permit that are considered undesirable (not on the Approved Street Tree List) will result in the property owner being required to remove and replace the tree with a tree on the Approved Street Tree List. Failure to comply will result in the removal of the tree by the City, at the property owner's expense, in accordance with Section 14.28.090 of the Long Beach Municipal Code.

Root barriers that limit hardscape damage from tree roots are required for street trees planted in tree wells or as noted on the Approved Street Tree list.

Tree Maintenance

There are over 50 varieties of street trees in the City of Long Beach. Each species requires different care; some trees require a two-year pruning cycle while others require an eight-year cycle. Immediate trimming may be required on some trees to protect public safety, while other trees are identified for trimming as time and resources allow. There are also a number of trees within the city that require special handling, for reasons including species, age, or location near buildings or power lines.

Each year City funds are budgeted for tree trimming services. The Public Service Bureau is responsible for trimming trees. Trims related to safety (tree limbs that interfere with safe passage of vehicles or pedestrians) are scheduled immediately. Other trims are scheduled as funds are available.

If a property owner wishes to have a parkway tree trimmed sooner than the City can schedule it, he/she may request and complete a no-fee Permit to Trim a Street Tree (Attachment C) from the Public Service Bureau. The property owner shall be responsible for the tree trimming and for all costs related to it, including clean up. A City-approved, licensed, bonded and insured contractor must do the actual trimming.

Work performed on any city tree must be done according to City specifications, which are based on criteria set by the International Society of Arboriculture, the National Arborist Association, and the American National Standards Institute. Trees shall be trimmed to encourage good development and preserve their health, structure and natural appearance. Topping, heading back, stubbing, lion tailing or pollarding is prohibited.

Root Pruning

The root system of a tree is one of its more important physiological components. Roots are the main source of water and mineral absorption for the tree; they provide anchorage and stability, and act as one of the principal storage areas for food.

Whenever possible, the City avoids removing any of the root system. Where there is a need to install subsurface structures or utilities, such as irrigation lines or block wall footings, every effort shall be made to avoid encroachment within the dripline of a tree. If it is necessary to excavate within a tree's dripline, every effort shall be made to tunnel under or through the tree's root system with a minimal amount of pruning, rather than to trench across the tree's roots. Any root over two (2") inches in diameter must be pre-approved for removal by the Public Service Bureau.

If a property owner wishes to have his/her street tree root pruned at their own expense, he/she shall request and complete a no-fee Permit to Root Prune a Street Tree (Attachment D) available from the Public Service Bureau.

Root pruning on a street tree may only be performed by a City-approved, licensed, bonded, insured contractor, who has in its employment a Certified Arborist, accredited by the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA).

Removal of Street Trees

The conservation of city trees, especially those in parkways, is a joint effort between the City and the adjacent neighbors. Property owners and/or their tenants are required to care for and properly maintain their parkway trees, and report any damaged or suspected diseased trees to the Public Service Bureau.

In general, the City will only remove, or allow removal of, a street tree if it is dead, dying, diseased, uprooted, damaged and in danger of falling, or where tree root-damaged sidewalks and curbing cannot otherwise be safely corrected. The City will not allow removal of a tree solely because of leaf, flower or berry debris.

Removal by City

Removal of a street tree at no cost to the adjacent property owner may be considered for the following reasons:

The tree is dead, dying, critically diseased or damaged beyond reasonable repair.

The tree is in danger of falling or uprooting.

There is a recognized danger of falling or dropping limbs, which combined with other factors such as disease or high winds, make corrective measures not cost-effective.

The tree is competing for light or space with adjacent trees that are more valuable because of their potential longer life, attractiveness, and/or more sturdy growth.

The tree is host to aggressive life-threatening disease or pests that threaten to spread to other trees.

The tree is in decline, and is estimated to have less than two years of life remaining.

Root pruning of the tree for hardscape repair would result in irreparable decline of the tree or the creation of a future hazard.

The tree is damaging vital infrastructure, such as a sewer line, water line, or gas or electrical conduit, or causing other major structural damage. (The property owner shall provide proof of such damage, verified with estimated repair costs by a licensed contractor.)

Convenience Removals – At Property Owner Expense

Removal of a street tree at property owner expense may be considered if the property owner agrees to all the applicable conditions outlined below. Property owners wishing removal of a parkway tree shall request and complete a no-fee Permit to Remove Street Tree(s) (Attachment E) available from the Public Service Bureau.

The property owner will pay all removal costs, including site cleanup, make any necessary repair of hardscape damage, and replace the tree. The tree must be replaced with an approved 24-inch box tree to be planted in an appropriate area of the parkway. The property owner will also pay for the equivalent of one (1) 15-gallon tree (approximate cost is \$75) to be planted elsewhere in the City. All fees collected for tree replacement will be placed in a designated Tree Fund, used solely for the enhancement of the community forest program.

The tree, stump and debris are to be removed by a City-approved licensed, bonded, insured contractor. If the sidewalk, curb and/or gutter or any infrastructure is damaged by the contractor while removing the tree (final conditions will be inspected by the City), the property owner agrees to have all damages repaired within forty-five (45) days after tree removal.

The property owner agrees to complete all permits, provide a bond for completion and secure a city-approved, licensed, bonded and insured contractor.

The property owner will contact any formally organized neighborhood association in writing, with a copy to the City, of his/her request to remove the tree.

The property owner will be responsible for notifying the City's Neighborhood and Historic Preservation Office if the tree is located within a designated historical area (Attachment G).

If a tree is being removed to accommodate repair of private property, all repairs must be completed 45 days after the removal of the tree. If the property owner fails to make repairs, the property owner will be assessed the full value of the tree based on ISA standards. The property owner will be required to replant a tree if the parkway space is available.

Removal of a street tree at property owner's expense will be considered for the following reasons:

To accommodate private construction projects.

For trees removed to accommodate private construction projects, the full-appraised value of the tree(s) must be paid to the City prior to removal. The value of the tree is derived from a formula developed by the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA), based on the size of the trunk measured at breast height, the species, the location, and the condition of the tree. The property owner shall be responsible for all removal costs.

Hardscape (curb, gutter and sidewalk) and/or private property repairs cost more than the monetary value of the street tree based on ISA standards.

Repair costs are based on the frequency of the repairs directly due to the species of tree, and the possible stability of the tree if root pruning was administered.

The property owner shall provide proof of such damage, including photographs, verified with estimated repair costs by a licensed contractor.

The tree is designated as a “Problem Tree Species” (Attachment F).

The tree is a direct cause of a medical problem.

The property owner shall provide written verification by a licensed medical physician prior to approval review.

The Director of Public Works or his/her designee is authorized to approve or deny all tree removal requests.

No work may be started until the Tree Removal Agreement is approved and all fees have been paid. Otherwise, the property owner may be assessed for the full value of the tree.

Tree/Hardscape Conflicts

The following guidelines have been established for correcting potentially hazardous situations that result from tree roots disturbing nearby hardscape.

Hardscape damage on public property may require a temporary asphalt ramp to be followed by permanent repair of the area as funds become available. All reported offsets/ deviations will be patched.

Hardscape damage on public property that creates a public safety hazard will be scheduled for repair, as funds are available.

Private Trees Obstructing Public Property

If a private tree, shrub, or other plant material causes a public hazard, a notice will be given to the property owner to remove the obstruction. Failure to comply will result in the obstruction being removed by the City at the property owner's expense.

Private Trees and Shrubs Damaging Public Property

If private trees or shrubbery cause damage to public property, including sidewalks, curbs, gutters, streets and alleys, repair of damaged areas is the responsibility of the abutting property owner. The property owner is required to obtain a Street Improvement Permit from the Engineering Bureau prior to making any repairs. If the property owner fails to make proper repairs, repairs will be made by the City at the property owner's expense.

Street Trees Damaging Private Property

If private property damage occurs as a direct result of a City tree, the property owner is responsible for filing a claim for damages with the City. Claim forms are available from the City Clerk Department or the City Attorney.

If the damage is on private property, and is not caused by a City-owned tree, the City is not responsible for damages or repairs.